








West Beyond the West:

BC Digitization Symposium 2008



Symposium Report
December 2008



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Overview

On December 1st and 2nd, 2008, more than 170 representatives from libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, the education and aboriginal communities, and other affiliated organizations came together to discuss the future of digitization at the BC Digitization Symposium. This event engaged participants as they learned about provincial and national initiatives supporting the digitization of cultural, heritage and educational content, discovered emerging strategies and priorities here in BC, and discussed how digitization might be better supported and coordinated in the province. Keynote

Ian Wilson, Librarian and Archivist of Canada, launched the symposium with his keynote address on the evening of December 1st. He encouraged participants to consider how to manage the “heritage business” to give Canadians the “knowledge advantage,” particularly in respect to control of their own content, in the 21st Century. He noted the importance of new partnerships, a made-in-Canada solution, and a national digital information strategy as key to building Canada’s knowledge base together. He also highlighted the many complex issues that are, and continue to be, the biggest challenges to digitization – standards, needs, rights, infrastructure, funding and participation. Ian emphasized that the digitization of Canadian cultural and heritage resources provides an exciting opportunity to debunk the national myth that our history is boring and provide students with more engaging and interactive ways to learn about history and find their place within it.

Pan-Canadian Panel

Events on December 2nd kicked off with the pan-Canadian panel, a trio of speakers from Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario who provided updates on digitization planning and projects underway in their regions. They also shared information about their provincial perspectives and experiences, community partners, best practices and what they've learned along the way.

Karen Hunt, Acting University Librarian at the University of Winnipeg discussed the Manitoba Digitization Summit, which took place in January 2008 and led to the formation of the Digital Alliance of Manitoba. Key strategies of the alliance will include developing a terms of reference and procedures for the alliance, convening further information and training events, and creating a web site that promotes digitization standards, training, communication amongst alliance members, and promotes effective discovery tools.

Christina Wilson, Director, Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library highlighted the role of The Alberta Library [TAL] has played in coordinating digitization in the province, and the fact that digitization is a key part of their strategic plan. TAL’s Alberta Public Library Electronic Network has recently hired a Digitization Project Coordinator to assess the status of projects in Alberta’s public libraries. Digitization projects in Alberta illustrate the diversity of groups involved, including not only TAL members, but also other

organization such as the Glenbow Museum, the Archives Society of Alberta, the Royal Alberta Museum, and CKUA, Canada's first public broadcaster.

Our Ontario's Director, **Loren Fantin**, closed out the pan-Canadian panel. OurOntario.ca is one of the services of Knowledge Ontario, a collaboration of libraries, cultural heritage organizations and educational institutions. OurOntario.ca services include an interactive search portal that provides a single search for different types of media across different organizations, digitization toolkits and resources. The toolkits enable communities to create, sustain, and deliver digital resources through the provision of standards-based web-based tools for creating and managing metadata, hosting of digital objects, search and browse functions on a locally branded site, discovery and interactive options, training, documentation, and a user community forum. Loren noted that OurOntario adopted a "just do it" approach, beginning with their Memory Project, which she believes helped to secure additional government funding for digitization. While she admitted that the initial challenges of developing a collaborative digitization program are real – technology, collaboration, and copyright, for example – Loren confirmed that a digitization program is sustainable, while a digitization project is not. While one-time project grants can be helpful to set up policies, procedures, workflows, standards and best practices, she encouraged participants to make a digitization program part of their annual budget.

BC Panel

The pan-Canadian panel was followed by a BC panel with speakers representing public and post-secondary libraries, archives and museums. Each of them provided an overview of digitization developments in their communities.

Lara Wilson, President of the Archives Association of British Columbia [AABC], noted some of their recently funded digitization projects, such as the City of Vancouver Archives digitization of "at risk" moving images, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs Digital Collections, the City of Richmond Archives BC Packers Photographs and Maps, the Prince Rupert City and Regional Archives Digitization of Nitrate and Acetate Negatives, and the BC Central Coast Archives Bella Coola Valley Digital Heritage Projects. Financial assistance for these projects came from a range of sources including the National Archival Development Program and the Archival Community Development Program (federal), the provincial Direct Access Grants (funded by provincial lottery revenues), and the Irving K. Barber Learning Center's BC History Digitization Program. Lara shared AABC's upcoming implementation of ICA AtoM, an open source archival description software in development in Canada by Artefactual Systems. Key features include multilevel description, digitized item linking, digital media upload / view, compliance with international standards, and support for authority files and a multilingual interface. ICA AtoM facilitates increasing BC content on the web and increased use of archival resources held by BC repositories.

Shelagh Flaherty, Director of Central Library and Reference Services, Vancouver Public Library, provided an overview of projects undertaken by public libraries across the province, which have focused on digitizing photographs, newspapers, audio files, local

histories, and directories. Highlighted projects included: The New Westminster Heritage Web Site, featuring over 3,300 photographs chronicling aspects of life in the Royal City back to 1858; the Historical Photo Archive of the West Vancouver Memorial Library, focusing on the period between the turn of the century of 1950; the Canadian Pacific Railway Collection, another addition to Vancouver Public Library's growing collection of digital historical photographs; Terrace Public Library's Eleanor Muehl Newspaper Archive; Prince George Public Library's Prince George Newspapers; Vancouver Public Library's online directories collections include the British Columbia City Directories 1860 – 1901; the Heritage Burnaby project, a partnership of the City of Burnaby and Burnaby Public Library.

An overview of digitization projects initiated by the museum community was provided by Irene Van Bavel, Heritage Information Analyst, Canadian Heritage Information Network [CHIN]. Artefacts Canada: Humanities contains more than 3 million object records and 580,000 images from hundreds of museums across the country, which highlight treasures from disciplines such as archeology, decorative arts, fine arts, ethnology, and history. Beauty and the Beast: The Mill at Britannia Mine is a virtual exhibit that features an Interactive Mill Flow Chart that allows users to move through the mill, with details of each element of the process / piece of machinery. Irene also noted various upcoming funding opportunities for virtual exhibits.

A review of digitization initiatives spearheaded by the post-secondary library community was provided by **Lynn Copeland**, University Librarian, Simon Fraser University Library. Lynn noted a wide range of projects that have been financially supported by the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre's BC History Digitization Program, such as: Colonial Despatches (University of Victoria Library); Northern BC Historical and Economic Explorations – Photographs (Northern BC Archives, University of Northern British Columbia); Robert Bateman Photographic Digitization Project (Royal Roads University Foundation); UBC Virtual Theatre Resource (UBC Department of Film, Theatre, and Creative Writing); BC Printing and Book Arts Digitization Project (Simon Fraser University Library); Okanagan Digitization Initiative (Okanagan College, Okanagan Regional Library, University of British Columbia - Okanagan); and the Dr Gerald Straley's Historical Collection of the Flora of BC (UBC Herbarium). Lynn also highlighted Multicultural Canada, which provides access to a range of digital collections in the form of newspapers, oral histories, photographs, books, newsletters, legal documents, meeting minutes and other ephemeral materials, representing various cultural groups. This project, led by SFU, has many partners and supporters. She also introduced West Beyond the West, BC's search and discovery portal for digitized collections.

BC Digitization Survey Results

After the morning's panel presentations and discussions, **Chris Hives**, University Archivist, University of British Columbia, reported on the results of the BC Digitization Survey conducted to inform the Symposium. A total of 167 respondents participated, from public libraries (34), post-secondary libraries (25), archives (21), museums (17), historical societies (14), school libraries / districts (6), government (5), and other / unspecified (45). 86 respondents (over half) are digitizing material. The most commonly

digitized materials are photographs, archival documents, audio recordings, newspapers, and maps. The top priorities for digitizing for all respondents, if funding were not an issue, were, in descending order, photographs, archival documents, audio recordings, films/video-recordings, maps, newspapers, and institutional information. For respondents who are researchers, the top priorities in order are photographs, archival documents, newspapers, and maps. The most common method of making digitized materials accessible was through the organizational website (73%). Other approaches include sharing metadata with initiatives like Canadiana.org, BC Archival Union / Archives Canada, the Canadian Heritage Information Network, Virtual Museums of Canada, and Multi-Cultural Canada. The most common funding sources were organizational operational budgets (72%) and the BC History Digitization Program, Irving K. Barber Learning Center (23%). The top reason for not digitizing cited was lack of funding. The majority (77%) have made use of digitized BC material in teaching / research. 81% thought that there is not adequate BC material in digital form to satisfy research / teaching needs.

BC User Panel

To succeed and be sustainable any digitization program must be informed by the needs of its user community. The final panel discussion of the day featured speakers from the educational, historical, and research sectors who shared perspectives from their sectors and reflected on what they heard during the day, including the opportunities and challenges ahead.

The first panelist, **Penney Clark**, Associate Professor at UBC's Faculty of Education, uses digitized materials both as a researcher and as an instructor. In this capacity she emphasized the importance of digitizing pan-Canadian resources, rather than focusing solely on provincial resources, and provided examples of resources that she feels need to be digitized, including textbooks, Department of Education reports, circulars and correspondence, Royal Commission and Commission of Inquiry reports and briefs, school board meeting minutes, parent teacher association notes, etc. Penney pointed out that digitization has huge potential for teachers of social studies. British Columbia archival sources are pertinent to the secondary social studies curriculum at grades ten and eleven, as well as to Civics 11, First Nations Studies 12, Social Justice 12 and Law 12 courses. Penney's feedback from teachers noted that digitized archival resources, as well as accompanying instructional plans, would be of great value. She closed by mentioning the History Education Network/Histoire et éducation en réseau (THEN/HiER) <<http://www.historyeducation.ca/>>, a SSHRC funded pan-Canadian network of academic historians, who inform, carry out, critique, and implement research into history education, including how best to develop online curriculum materials.

John Lutz, Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of Victoria, is a researcher who uses and creates digital materials. An advocate for digitization, one of John's key points was that history is too important to be boring and that digital technology makes it possible to engage students and the public in the past in new and exciting ways. John questioned what kind of relationship we want to have between the user and creator of digital content, and noted the importance of: involving

users in the process of building digitized collections; building specialized and subject specific portals; building collections to support curriculum; and promoting digitized collections once they've been built. John also noted the importance of balancing mass digitization projects with micro ones that are specialized and have depth and context. He concluded by highlighting the importance of breaking down barriers between sectors, institutions, and different types of data, in order to best foster a new historically literate generation who will become our greatest advocates in the future.

Brenda L. Smith from the BC Historical Federation rounded out the user panel, offering her perspective as a researcher of community and generational issues, educator of family historians (who are often very motivated users of digitized resources), and worker with community literacy groups. She emphasized the need for user communities to get ongoing support in the use of digitized collections, which might take the form of indexing and more efficient search tools, instructional resources and social networking opportunities. Brenda also offered a range of recommendations from the perspective of local and family historians to inform future digitization projects, including: involve users in planning; create an inventory of digitization projects; find ways to incorporate private collections into projects; expand the range of materials digitized to include those in the recent past. Brenda also recommended mobilizing family and community historians to assist with advocacy for future digitization initiatives.

Participant Priorities

Following the three panel discussions and survey presentation, symposium delegates participated in a pairs reflection exercise in which they discussed what they heard in the first two presentations. Then, each table discussed opportunities, challenges, issues, and concerns regarding two of eight topics, including: building staff capacity, usage, collaboration & partnership, access, funding, technology, collections, and governance. In the next exercise, each table selected one of their two assigned topics to focus on, and brainstormed actions and activities to address the opportunities, challenges, issues, and concerns. The top actions/activities from each table were collected, collated, de-duplicated and transferred to large sheets of paper around the room. Each participant was given 5 red dots to indicate what they saw as the top 5 actions/activities that should be taken provincially.

The top six priorities identified by participants as key for digitization in BC included:







1. developing digitization toolkits, ideally free and open source, which include information about copyright, best practices, FAQs, etc.
2. developing a business case to secure sustainable funding, linking local, provincial and national strategies
3. adopting common protocols, metadata standards and guidelines for digitization
4. creating a centralized infrastructure/consortia for coordination, communications, strategies, etc.
5. enhancing the West Beyond the West portal by adding content, tags, metadata, Web 2.0 features

6. developing resource packages connecting teachers with digital collections supporting curriculum.

Organizing Committee Recommendations for Next Steps

The priorities coming out of the symposium form an ambitious agenda. While all are desirable, some are only achievable in a longer, multi-year timeframe. The Symposium Organizing Committee has identified six recommendations for “next steps” based on the priorities above. These recommendations represent practical, “do-able” actions which can be completed within a year and which will move the initiative forward towards the vision created by the priorities.

The number(s) in square brackets after each recommendation indicates which priorities above the recommendation addresses.

-  Develop the symposium Organizing Committee as an informal coalition to coordinate the development of this initiative. Mandate to include advocacy, capacity building, and fostering cross-sectoral collaboration. A key step would be to consider whether the membership of the committee is appropriate and representative of the major content creator and user groups. [4]
-  Create a "BC Digitization Website" with information and links on this initiative, digitization best practices, standards in different fields, partner organizations, as well as tools and resources. [1, 3]
-  The committee to strike a Grants sub-committee to investigate initial sources of funding. [2]
-  The committee to strike a Users sub-committee to consider how best to engage and balance the voices of digital collection creation organizations with user organizations. A first focus will be on seeking how to engage with the K-12 community around resource packages. [6]
-  Promote the West Beyond the West search engine to all creator sectors. Develop promotional resources to outline the value of the central search portal and inform organizations how to upload their metadata. [5]
-  Promote the Digital Collection Builder/ICA-AtoM, a free tool for creating digital collections which BC organizations have had a major role in developing. Training events are already planned by the archival and library communities. [1, 3]

The Organizing Committee is seeking feedback from Symposium participants on the recommendations. Please consider these recommendations, either as individuals or within your organizations, and submit feedback to the Organizing Committee. You can send responses by email to the Committee member representing your sector or to office@eln.bc.ca , or use the Feedback form on the Symposium website.

